Current major event

Measles outbreak in Afghanistan

Since the beginning of current year, a series of suspected measles outbreak has ripped Afghanistan. As many as seven out of thirty-four provinces in the country has reported suspected cluster of measles cases in recent time. The DEWS surveillance officers have investigated all these suspected clusters, conducted an active case search, collected the laboratory specimen for confirmation and strengthened the case management of the suspected cases.
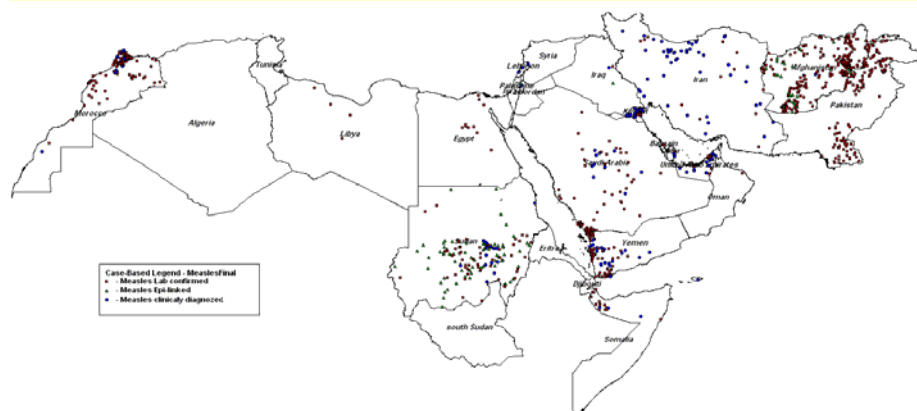
Editorial note

Measles is one of the leading causes of death among young children in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) even though a safe and cost-effective vaccine is available. In the EMR, 6,510 cases of measles were reported in 2010 *(Please see the table)* out of which 1,991 cases were reported from Afghanistan.

In 1997, the 22 countries of the World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) adopted a resolution to eliminate measles from the region by 2010. However, in the year 2010, the EMR moved the target year for measles elimination to 2015 since some countries in the Region, particularly those in conflicts and humanitarian crisis lagged behind in achieving the goal.

The strategic plan drawn up for the EMR to achieve this goal of measles elimination include (i) achieving high population immunity through implementing nation-wide measles catch-up vaccination campaign; (ii) maintaining high population immunity through achieving high vaccination coverage (95% coverage in all districts through routine and/or follow-up supplementary immunization activities; (iii) strong case-based surveillance with laboratory-confirmation for measles; (iv) optimal case management.

Given the successes achieved in routine immunization services across the Region, measles elimination in the EMR is achievable if all the 22 EMR countries are able to ensure that every child in the

Region is vaccinated against measles. The greatest impediments to achieving these milestones, however, is the weak and fragile health infrastructure in countries with complex emergencies resulting in poor surveillance, as well as low routine immunization coverage of children against measles.

The on-going conflicts in Afghanistan is a serious challenge to the EMR's goal of elimination of measles. Low immunization coverage of infants and inadequate surveillance due to lack of access to health services in security compromised areas are leading to low measles population immunity resulting in building-up of excessive susceptibles. The periodic outbreaks as seen in Afghanistan in recent time is, presumably, due to these factors.

In situations like that in Afghanistan and some other countries in the EMR, a specific plan needs to be drawn up to accelerate the progress in reducing measles incidence and mortality in line with EMR's goal of measles elimination by the year 2015..

Cumulative geographic distribution of measles cases in the EMR, Nov 2010-Jan 2011

Measles cases reported from Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries

Country	Cases in 2010	Cases in Jan 2011
Afghanistan	1991	70
Iran	561	15
Iraq	283	2
Pakistan	941	88
Total in EMR	**6510**	**446**

Update on outbreaks
in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Measles in Afghanistan, **A(H5N1)** in Egypt, **Chikungunya** in Yemen, **Cutaneous Anthrax** in s. Sudan

Current public health events of international concern
[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), **CFR %**]

Avian influenza	
Egypt	[143 (47), **32.9%**]
Indonesia	[176 (145), **82.4 %**]
Viet Nam	[119(59), **49.6%**
China	[40(26), **65%**]
Global total	[552 (322), **58.3%**]
Cholera	
Haiti	[243197*(4626), 1.9 **%**]
Chad	[2508 (111), **4.4%**]
Cutaneous Anthrax	
S. Sudan	[19(0)]#
Meningococcal disease	
Chad	[923(57), **6.1 %**]#
Chikungunya fever	
Yemen	[15000(104), **0.6 %**]#
Yellow fever	
Uganda	[226(53), **23.4 %**]
Sierra Leone	[2(0),]

*CFR=Case-Fatality Rate; * Number of hospital visits; # Suspected cases only*